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U.S. Plans Gestures to North Korea

By Don Oberdorfer
 Washington Post Staff Writer

President Reagan told South Korean President Roh Tae Woo yesterday that the United States will soon announce conciliatory gestures toward North Korea to support Roh's South-North initiative, administration officials said yesterday.

The administration's plans were made known at a two-hour White House discussion and luncheon during the South Korean leader's brief "official working visit."

Officials said the U.S. measures, which are expected to be announced formally next week, will include a resumption of informal U.S. contacts with North Korean diplomats, easing of some U.S. travel restrictions for North Koreans coming here and Americans going to North Korea, and limited North Korean purchases of U.S. medicines and other humanitarian supplies.

The United States is not contemplating either a broad lifting of the 38-year-old ban on trade with North Korea or removal of North Korea from the list of countries the United States says practices international terrorism, officials said.

The United States wants "to be of any help we can" to the South Korean initiative, Reagan told reporters while posing for pictures with Roh in the White House Rose Garden before their meeting.

In the same informal news appearance, Reagan generated speculation about the withdrawal of some of the 46,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. Asked by a reporter if he could "envision a time in the near future when the U.S. would be reducing its military presence," Reagan responded that is "a possibility." He added that this would not be a question of "just withdrawing" but one of being "no longer needed."

Assistant Secretary of State Gaston J. Sigur told reporters later that "there's no intention of anything of that sort" taking place in the foreseeable future. He added, "you



BY FRANK JOHNSTON—THE WASHINGTON POST

South Korean President Roh Tae Woo waves to reporters as he accompanies President Reagan to the White House Rose Garden before meeting yesterday.

would have to have a firm belief . . . that the threat from North Korea was over. The threat is not over; there is no indication that we have that the threat is about to be over."

State and Defense Department officials said there has been no recent consideration at policymaking levels of reducing the U.S. troop strength in Korea. But they said a reduction in tension and troop levels by North and South Korea could bring a parallel U.S. reduction that a State Department source called "way down the pike."

A senior defense official said that although Pyongyang has stated that it has demobilized 100,000 troops in recent months, there is "no sign whatsoever" of a reduction of North Korean military forces. Moreover, there is concern in Washington about new Soviet weapons being supplied to North Korea, including Mig25 jet fighters and SA5 surface-to-air missiles.

President Jimmy Carter caused

alarm in Asia and some U.S. circles by advocating the removal of U.S. ground troops and withdrawing 3,400 before being forced to stop. There has been little inclination to consider a similar proposal during the Reagan presidency, and several officials said they were baffled by Reagan's response except as a purely philosophical statement.

State and Defense department officials confirmed that there is active discussion with South Korea about moving the large U.S. military headquarters and a sprawling U.S. military golf course out of the crowded and prosperous city of Seoul. But the command, and probably the golf course, would be relocated elsewhere in Korea.

In an interview with editors and reporters of The Washington Post and Newsweek on Wednesday, Roh said there is "a general agreement" with U.S. authorities that relocation is desirable, but that details have not yet been worked out.